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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

Statement submitted by Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Statement

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) looks forward to the 51st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women and the opportunity it presents to further the work of Member States towards women's empowerment, human rights and gender equality. WILPF once again expresses its full and unequivocal support for the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA) and the outcomes of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly. In the years since its inception in 1915, WILPF has continually worked to prevent armed conflicts and to establish the conditions for sustainable peace on a global scale. Without gender equality, sustainable peace, sustainable development and true human security is unattainable. In its work to achieve these ends, WILPF has participated in all of the United Nations World Conferences on Women and sessions of the CSW. It remains committed to working to ensure that in these fora and others, there is continued work done on ensuring that the struggle for women's human rights, security and empowerment in all spheres goes beyond policy and is translated into reality through a process in which women are fully and effectively included.

In its development of policy in relation to eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child and its evaluation of prior commitments in relation to the role of men and boys, the Commission once again has the opportunity to translate words into actions.

WILPF looks forward to the Commission's consideration of the theme of the "elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child." In this regard, we look forward to Member State's critically identifying gaps and challenges in implementation so as to develop policy which will allow more rapid and effective progress.

While discrimination and violence against the girl child is present world-wide and in times of peace, some of its most devastating examples and effects are seen in armed-conflict. The impact on girls of armed conflict is particularly severe. Not only are they particularly vulnerable as children, but their being girl children mean that this impact is compounded. That they are differently affected and have specific needs and interest and require specific protection is recognized in several Security Council Resolutions – resolution 1325 on women, peace and security and resolutions 1261, 1314, 1379, 1460, 1539 and 1612 – all dealing with specific issues regarding children in armed conflict. International and humanitarian law provides protection for girls against harm and abuse during armed conflict and particular protections are found in the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

WILPF calls on all Member States to respect this international law and more broadly to commit to the goals and objectives that they seek to further. WILPF urges governments to implement the recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting held by the Division for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with UNICEF on "The girl child and armed conflict: Recognizing and addressing grave violations of girls' human rights."

In particular, WILPF urges the UN system and Member States to address sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeeping personnel, including through effective pre-deployment training of

personnel and through the establishment and enforcement of accountability mechanisms. More broadly, and on the national level, WILPF urges governments to ensure that their national legislation conforms to international norms and standards regarding the rights of women and girls and prohibitions against violence against them; that monitoring and accountability mechanisms in relation to such violence are established and fully and effectively funded; and that national judicial systems and health care and other services are functional and accessible and attend to the needs of girls affected by conflict.

WILPF also urges governments to recognize and change the attitudes and behaviors that cause and perpetuate the gender inequality in society in which such discrimination and violence is rooted. Education plays a key role in this and governments have, through their commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, committed, at the very least to the goal of universal primary education for all children – including girls. Access to quality education for girls is essential for their empowerment.

WILPF calls on Member States to actively pursue and properly fund programs to promote access to education for girls but, in addition, to educate all in society, including men and boys, about gender and about gender discrimination, its causes and consequences and to seek to include all in bringing about its elimination. The necessity of including all members of society in the elimination of discrimination provides the crucial link with the other theme considered by the Commission in its 51st Session.

In this regard WILPF welcomes the evaluation by the Commission of progress in the implementation of the previously agreed conclusions on the theme of the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality. WILPF recognizes that discrimination against women is not a problem which can be addressed through the empowerment of women alone. Gender and sex discrimination is rooted in patriarchy which defines and controls the roles of both men and women and both boys and girls. Men and boys too are constrained by these roles and the achievement of gender equality is of benefit to society as a whole, including for men and boys. It is necessary to critically examine all of these roles, to examine masculinities and femininities and, furthermore, to see that without a shift in the norms and beliefs of society as a whole in this regard, the implementation of the BPFA, the Millennium Development Goals and other commitments is impossible and true gender equality unattainable. The contribution of men and boys in this cannot be undervalued. WILPF looks forward to Member States' evaluation of their prior commitments with a view to furthering their practical implementation.

Just as the role of men and boys is critical in achieving gender equality, so too is it necessary to recognize that the elimination of discrimination and violence against the girl child cannot stand separate from the elimination of such discrimination and violence against women. And such cannot stand separate from the empowerment of women. Their empowerment and the realization of their role as equal decision makers in society makes it more likely that decisions will be made that take the needs and interest of girls into account. In addition, girls will be further empowered through the provision of role models to which they can aspire.

The UN system too needs to provide positive examples and more effective frameworks and mechanisms by which to pursue the larger project of achieving gender equality and the empowerment

of women – of which the themes considered by the Commission are but one part. In this regard the UN system needs to set a positive example and to provide effective frameworks and mechanisms to pursue this work. WILPF reiterates the call made by NGOs at previous sessions of the Commission and to and by the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence to more effectively pursue gender mainstreaming and to seriously upgrade and better resource the gender equality architecture of the United Nations.

In all of these issues, in order to develop more effective and responsive policies and progress, it is necessary that there be better documentation, monitoring and reporting. This is not possible without the provision of sex-disaggregated data. WILPF calls on Member States to support the development of statistical collection that is disaggregated in this manner and all Member States and the UN system itself to provide the technical and financial support to make this possible. Failure to do so indicates a lack of commitment to making a meaningful effort and to dedicating real resources to achieving gender equality. Achieving gender equality requires action. Action is unlikely to be effective if it is not based on the reality revealed by data and facts.

WILPF continues to support and work towards making gender equality a reality and to ensuring collective human security and sustainable peace. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with all stakeholders to create a culture of peace and a world in which all, including girl children, are free from violence and all forms of oppression.